BISS Biodiversity Information Science and Standards

Biodiversity Information Science and Standards 5: e73732
doi: 10.3897/biss.5.73732

OPEN ACCESS

Conference Abstract

Cultivating Resilience in the Biodiversity Heritage Library During the Global Pandemic: Improving access to existing content

Colleen Funkhouser[‡,§], Constance Rinaldo[|], David Iggulden[¶], Kelli Trei[#], Martin R. Kalfatovic[‡,§], Bianca Crowley[‡,§]

‡ Biodiversity Heritage Library, Washington D.C., United States of America
§ Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., United States of America
| Biodiversity Heritage Library, Temple, United States of America
¶ Kew Gardens, Richmond, United Kingdom
# University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, United States of America

Corresponding author: Colleen Funkhouser (funkhouserc@si.edu), Constance Rinaldo (farmandcircus@gmail.com)

Received: 30 Aug 2021 | Published: 31 Aug 2021

Citation: Funkhouser C, Rinaldo C, Iggulden D, Trei K, Kalfatovic MR, Crowley B (2021) Cultivating Resilience in the Biodiversity Heritage Library During the Global Pandemic: Improving access to existing content. Biodiversity Information Science and Standards 5: e73732. https://doi.org/10.3897/biss.5.73732

Abstract

The events of 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice demonstrations around the world, helped the Biodiversity Heritage Library (BHL) refocus our priorities for implementing our 2020–2025 Strategic Plan, which was adopted in April 2020. BHL's natural ecosystem relies on virtual coordination across our global community. For this reason, much of the work of the consortium could continue during lockdowns and telework mandates at many of our partner institutions. Though most digitization projects were placed on hold, staff were able to shift priority to metadata enhancements to improve access and discoverability of existing content. Long-planned improvements in the use of persistent identifiers were pushed to the forefront of technical development. Improvements to the data model and user interface to better support born-digital content and articles were also prioritized in the 2021 Technical Priorities. Back-end improvements to the BHL website, currently under development, will also facilitate easier metadata import and updates, making it faster and easier to add article-level metadata, which will improve

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the CC0 Public Domain Dedication.

search and discoverability for articles within the collection. These technical improvements will continue to define BHL as a tool to connect biodiversity data.

Part of our collaborative resilience is our ability to adapt and adjust to changing priorities. Over the past year, BHL has been working to review and update our Collection Development Policy. Social justice movements and discussions concerning the harmful content in BHL's collection are helping to inform the review of our collection development policy in ways we wouldn't have anticipated prior to 2020. Our review now includes strategies to identify gaps in and improve representation of biodiversity information from underrepresented regions, languages, cultures, and perspectives. We are also working with colleagues to support larger efforts within the library profession to improve and broaden metadata such as subject headings. We will continue to address the problematic historical legacy of natural history collections through actions defined in our strategic plan.

The isolation and work from home orders of 2020 and early 2021 provided opportunities for some to expand into deep research and contribute to collaborative projects as work assignments became digital and thus more versatile. For example, transcription projects were accelerated because staff had more time to contribute to these resource-intensive activities. One result of this work is that more handwritten materials such as field notes and correspondence are now available for full-text searching and taxonomic name recognition within BHL.

Another strategic goal of BHL is to grow consortial partnerships and alliances to foster cross-institutional collaboration. BHL sought new partnerships that would integrate BHL data into existing and emerging biodiversity projects. This cross-institutional collaboration is another way to cultivate resilience and sow the seeds of sustainability.

In this talk, we will describe how BHL shifted its focus to reflect on and respond to global events of 2020. We will share discussions around acknowledging and addressing the harmful legacy content in BHL collections, new technical developments, and examples of collaborative telework projects.

Keywords

open science, biodiversity data, community collaboration

Presenting author

Colleen Funkhouser

Presented at

TDWG 2021